

## THE MINING TOWN OF "WHITE KNOB"

"White Knob", the name given the conspicuous mountain top of blue-gray limestone above Mackay to the West, has been the name origin for many a Mackay entity from motels to mining companies, and more importantly, for a small mining town once located above Mackay on the "mine hill".

The late 1800's saw a flurry of mining interest and prospectors in the shadow of White Knob, the mountain. This early exploration was followed by claims, filed by monied investors sensing the wealth of the area, and by the early mining settlements of Cliff City, Alder, and later White Knob, which was located a few miles up the mine hill road and in sight of what is now Mackay.

White Knob's birth coincided with that of the village of Mackay after the Oregon Short Line railroad extended its tracks from Blackfoot in 1901. But White Knob's growth and existence was tied to and paralleled the fortunes of the mining companies operating on the "Hill". After smelters and crushing mills were built at Mackay, miners flocked to the area and took to the "Hill" to earn a living. From 1901 through 1905 the number of men working at the mines fluctuated from 100 to 400 men changing with production, prices and changes in metal recovery technology. Some of these miners resided in Mackay and commuted up and down to the mines but the majority opted to stay on the "hill", some with families, and White Knob came into being. Living quarters were crude. Though some were cabin type structures, many were cave-like dwellings carved into the side of the hill. During the summer months, the town resembled a tent city.

In 1906 new management of the mines adopted a leasing system which proved to be very successful and provided a sense of permanency to the miners, and their families, and the outlook was bright for their new little town. A school was erected with about 30 pupils, and a mercantile and other small businesses established to supply the needs of residents. Fortunately for the mining company and residents alike, the close proximity of the Taylor sawmill on the "hill", insured an ample supply of lumber and timbers for expansion of the mines and the erection of buildings for the mine, town and residences.

According to a Mackay Miner issue of August 1915, the population of White Knob was about 500; some 300 men working the mines, and some 75 women with children. The place was booming! By 1916 a mine boarding house had been erected( some said with the best meals in the valley), a post office was established (Frances Fishel postmaster), a movie house was in business, Fishel's Cash Store was thriving plus a pool hall, barbershop, and restaurant. The school had 30 students and was being taught by Miss Litton of Butte. 1917 saw the Donaldson amusement hall erected where dances and entertainment were featured. A daily stage from Mackay made the 4 mile trip up the hill with the mail and passengers (even though the road was in constant need of upgrading)and telephone service from Mackay was established that same year. White knob, at its peak, boasted a population of nearly a 1000, but a number that would vary greatly as activity at the mines fluctuated wildly with the price of copper, and a world war. Photographs of the area show that cabins, homes and mine buildings dotted the entire hillside, usually close to the particular mine lease being worked and not necessarily near the cluster of businesses that made up the town's center. The 20's would see the addition of rooming houses, another pool hall and saloon and more stores.

By the late 20's , with copper prices very low, mining activity slowed and the town's population dwindled. The general election of 1928 showed only 15 voters. In 1930, with the country in the great depression, most mining operations on the "hill" were suspended, and the exodus from White Knob continued until by 1932 any families left in town were sending their children to school

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in Mackay.(All 7 of them)

Like most towns entirely dependent on the mining industry, White Knob suffered and finally became just the memory it is today. A trip up the "hill" today reveals little of the bustling community of 70 years ago. Most of the cabins or dwellings of substance were either moved down the mountain or torn down for salvage. A closer look throughout forest growth will show the weathered remains of many a cabin site. Unfortunately, almost all evidence of past days has been gleaned by souvenir hunting sightseers. There are a few residents of Mackay who can still remember their days living at White Knob. If you know one, ask them to tell you a story or two from the glory days of "**White Knob**".